

California Senate passes package of bills aiming to address housing crisis

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California state senators passed a package of housing legislation Thursday, a bid to spend more on low-income housing as well as make it easier for developers to build.

The two marquee measures — Senate Bill 35 from Sen. Scott Wiener (D-San Francisco) and Senate Bill 3 from Sen. Jim Beall (D-San Jose) — would force cities that have fallen behind on their state housing production goals to reduce some of the hoops they put in place to approve developments and would authorize a \$3-billion bond to spend on low-income housing on the 2018 statewide ballot.

“What the bill does do is create actual accountability,” Wiener said of SB 35. “Because local control is about how you meet your housing goals, not whether you meet your housing goals.”

Beall’s measure would increase state funding for building and preserving low-income multifamily developments, farmworker housing and low-income projects near transit.

“It is the beginning of a solution for our problem,” Beall said.

Both bills received an unusual coalition of support. Some Democratic senators voted no on Wiener’s measure while some GOP lawmakers supported it. Beall’s measure needed two-thirds supermajority support and multiple Republicans voted yes.

The package of housing bills is an effort to meet Gov. Jerry Brown’s demand to approve new funding for low-income housing only if the Legislature also makes building less costly. Efforts last year to address the state’s housing problems failed, and lawmakers introduced more than 130 housing bills this year.

Two major housing funding bills have yet to receive full votes in the Senate or Assembly: a proposal from Sen. Toni Atkins (D-San Diego) to add a \$75 fee on real estate transactions — except for home and commercial property sales — and one from Assemblyman David Chiu (D-San Francisco) to eliminate the state’s mortgage interest deduction from second homes. Combined, the measures would raise roughly \$600 million a year for low-income housing development. Because those bills require two-thirds supermajority votes of the Legislature, they don’t have to pass their initial house by Friday’s deadline.